

Title: Quince Blossoms and Gold-Thread Embroidery: Motifs in the Love-Songs and Oral Ballads of Bosnian Muslims

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This paper will examine the symbolism and cultural context of some common motifs, including various fruits, flowers, and types of embroidery in the *sevdalinke* (Bosnian love-songs) and oral ballads of the Bosnian Muslims.

There is a great variety of symbolism in Bosnian Moslem oral ballads and *sevdalinke*, symbolism which is often both delicate and subtle. Emotions are expressed by objects, which have rich layers of connotations beyond their immediate use. For example, a *jagluk* is a man's handkerchief, embroidered with silver or gold thread, and given to the man who is courting a woman, by a sister to a male relative, or by a bride to a member of her wedding party. The mere mention of the word *jagluk* immediately carries a rich layer of symbolism, of the emotions of love and usually of courting, of the hours of care and creativity involved in designing and embroidering, for each is one-of-a-kind creation.

One of the most poignant images of both a *jagluk* and the process of embroidery can be found in the final lines of the ballad "Kad je kuga Mostar pohodila" ("When The Plague Was Afflicting Mostar"). Bahtijarević's fiancée has died, and he is asked, as her true love, to lower her into her grave:

Primače se Bahtijareviću:
ispade mu srma jagluk vezen.

Progovara Bahtijareviću:
»Truhni, vehni, moj vezen jagluče,

Truhnu ruke koje su te vezle,
sitni zubi koje što konce trgahu,
medna usta što žice brojahu!«
(Maglajlić. 1995:290)

Bahtijarević approached:
From his waistband a kerchief
embroidered with silver fell.

Bahtijarević began to speak:
»Fall to pieces, and wither, my embroidered
handkerchief,

Fall to pieces the hands which embroidered
you,
The small teeth which broke off the threads,
The honey-sweet lips which counted the
stitches«

(Translation by M. Belyavski-Frank)

In these few lines we have a summation of the whole tragedy of her death, the love between them, symbolized by the fallen *jagluk*, her gift to him, and his words to her hands, teeth, and lips.

Works Cited

Maglajlić, Munib. *Usmena balada Bošnjaka*. Sarajevo: Preporod, 1995.